THE FOUNDING OF THE EARLIER OR WESTERN HAN DYNASTY

The rebellions which made a sudden and violent end to the Ch'in dynasty brought an almost entirely new set of families to the fore. Here and there members of the princely houses of the later centuries of the Chou appear prominently as actors, but either the vigor of these lines had run out or most of their able members had been exterminated by Shih Huang Ti and in the wars that preceded his victories. It was largely offspring of relatively undistinguished progenitors who emerged as leaders from the free competition of the fresh period of disorder.

The most prominent of the new men were Hsiang Yii (or Hsiang Chi) and Liu Chi (or Liu Pang). Hsiang Yii was of great height, marked impetuosity and generosity, and superb physical prowess. His father had been a general of Ch'u, whose stronghold was, it will be recalled, in the Yangtze Valley, and had perished when that state was being conquered b}' the Ch'in. When insurrection broke out against the incompetent successor of Shih Huang Ti, Hsiang Yii took service under his uncle, Hsiang Liang, who was seeking to restore Ch'u. A member of the former ruling house of Ch'u, found living in obscurity as a shepherd, was elevated to the headship of that principality. When, in the vicissitudes of war, Hsiang Liang was defeated and lost his life, Hsiang Yii quickly rose to the supreme command of the armies of Ch'u, and, his prince being very much of a puppet, bade fair to be not only the chief man of Ch'u but of the Empire. It was he who led the forces which sacked the Ch'in capital and put to death the

feeble grandson of Shih Huang Ti, and, when this had been done, it was he who proclaimed his titular master Emperor, under the title of I Ti. He parcelled out the realm among the leading generals of the victorious rebels and among some of the Ch'in generals who had submitted, giving them the title of *Wang*. He himself became the *Wang* of Ch'u (B.C. 206). This, it will be noted, was a revival of decentralization. The headquarters of the new regime were established not on the plain of the Wei but in the present Hunan, nearer the center of Ch'u, from which Hsiang Yii's support seems largely to have been derived. Hsiang Yii soon fell out with the new Emperor and had him killed. This act precipitated the inevitable struggle between the rival generals.